



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE MINUTES**

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

MINUTES

February 24, 2022, 5PM

Members present: Ben Echevarria, Zoe Iacovino, Laura Pitone, Beverly (Bev) Schwartz, Kat Rutkin, Jessica Lieberman, Meagan Benetti, Matthew McLaughlin, Lucas Schaber, Crystal Turner

Members not present: Ona Ferguson, George Proakis

Staff attending: Anna Corning, Hope Williams, Collins Center - Elizabeth Corbo, Collins Center - Steve McGoldrick, Collins Center - Marilyn Contreas

Other attending: Carol, Klaus Schultz, Crystal H., Jack Perenick, Kimberly Wells, Stephen Mackey, Harriotte Ranvig

Meeting started at 5:05PM

Decisions:

1. Committee approved minutes from 2/10.
 - a. Seven 5s
2. Committee voted to *not* add an emergency measures provision to the charter.
 - a. Seven 4s
 - b. One 3
3. Committee approved drafting language for City Council to hire their own advisory legal counsel and ensuring the language includes guardrails and a funding mechanism.
 - a. Eight 5s
 - b. One 4
4. Committee approved drafting language allowing City Council to hire staff.
 - a. Nine 5s
 - b. One 4
5. Committee voted to *not* include a time requirement for City Council in the charter.
 - a. Nine 5s
 - b. One 4
6. Committee approved drafting language stating compensation must exist for the Mayor, City Council, and School Committee, and that the language will be as similar as possible.
 - a. Ten 5s
7. Committee approved drafting language stating that compensation changes should not take effect until the next election.
 - a. Ten 5s
8. Committee approved drafting standard ordinance enforcement language.

- a. Ten 5s

The committee uses the Fist to Five method of voting, a technique for gauging consensus. Voting ranges from 0 to 5. The scale is: 0 - no way, 1 - major issues to be resolved now, 2 - minor issues to be resolved now, 3 - minor issues to be resolved later, 4 - comfortable with this as it is, 5 - love this and will champion it. 0-2 is considered a lack of consensus, while 3-5 is considered consensus.

NOTES

1. Welcome 5:03
 - a. Anna welcomed the committee and community members and led an icebreaker, where committee members went around and shared if they were an olympian in any sport, what sport they would choose.
2. Approve 2/10 Minutes 5:09
 - a. **Meeting minutes from 2/10 were approved.**
3. Public Comment 5:10
 - a. Committee heard a public comment from Crystal H. (supporting CC support mechanisms like staff and legal counsel).
4. Deliberation Topic 1: Emergency Measures 5:15
 - a. Committee discussed adding an emergency measures provision to the charter, which is a way for City Council to pass ordinances in an expedited way in the case of an emergency. The committee members felt mostly neutral on the issue and could not find much of an upside to this provision.
 - i. **Committee voted to *not* add an emergency measures provision to the charter.**
5. Deliberation Topic 2: Advisory Legal Counsel for City Council 5:25
 - a. Committee discussed the option to add advisory legal counsel for City Council to the charter. Matt McLaughlin expressed the importance of this issue for city councilors and he believes this resource is a need. Other committee members expressed their support and explained that this could build trust within the government. Committee members agreed that it is important to have clear funding mechanisms and guardrails in the charter, similar to the City of Beverley. The committee agreed it is important to not have the funding mechanism be a blank check.
 - i. **Committee approved drafting language for City Council to hire their own advisory legal counsel and ensuring the language includes guardrails and a funding mechanism.**
6. Deliberation Topic 3: Staff for City Council 5:45
 - a. Committee discussed the option to enshrine City Council's ability to hire staff in the charter. City Council is currently enabled to hire staff, but this provision would make the ability permanent in the charter. Many committee members agreed that this is an

important provision to add to the charter and there was a discussion of the history of this issue in Somerville.

- i. **Committee approved drafting language allowing City Council to hire staff.**

7. Deliberation Topic 4: City Council Allocated Time 6:05

- a. Committee discussed the hardships of adding specific time allocations around City Council seeing as the two municipalities that are full time do not state this in their charters, and the only way other municipalities do this is via a prohibition on other work. Committee members weighed the positives and negatives of including this in the charter versus not.

- i. **Committee voted to *not* include a time requirement for City Council in the charter.**
- ii. One committee member brought up the importance of including the student loan forgiveness program in the other materials the committee presents at the end.

8. Deliberation Topic 5: Compensation for Mayor, City Council, and School Committee 6:25

- a. Committee discussed including the requirement of compensation for the work of the Mayor, City Council, and School Committee. Many committee members agreed that this is a values-based decision and it should be included in the charter.

- i. **Committee approved drafting language stating compensation must exist for the Mayor, City Council, and School Committee, and that the language will be as similar as possible.**
- b. Committee discussed when pay increases should take effect, either in the current year or following year. Anna mentioned it is a best practice and the current practice for it to not take place until the following year. Committee members felt mostly neutral on this.
 - i. **Committee approved drafting language stating that compensation changes should not take effect until the next election.**

9. Deliberation Topic 5: Ordinance Enforcement 6:35

- a. Anna outlined the way ordinance enforcement exists in the current charter and best practices. Committee members felt mostly neutral on this, and some had questions about what to do if a mayor is not properly enforcing ordinances.

- i. **Committee approved drafting standard ordinance enforcement language.**

10. Deliberation Topic 5: Department Heads 6:45

- a. Committee began deliberations on the topic of the department heads, which Anna pointed out is a large topic. Anna shared the difference between best practices and the current Somerville practices, which mostly surround time limits (and a lack thereof). City Council President Matt McLaughlin emphasized that the lack of accountability around provisional appointments makes city councilors feel that this process is pointless. Other committee members agreed with Matt, and emphasized the importance of having reappointments come up every election. Anna clarified that having a limit on the number of days a temporary appointment can serve would solve this issue, and the terms limits question is something the committee must address.

- b. As time ran out, Anna explained that the committee will continue this conversation at the next meeting.

11. Closing:

- a. Anna thanked everyone and reminded them the next meeting is March 10th at 5pm.